

A day in the life

Mary McCormack: Clinical nurse manager

The 'pink apron' medication management system is just one initiative that can save nurses' time on wards. **Ann Keating** reports

NURSING was not Mary McCormack's first career choice. Before joining the health-care profession, she was a chef. Although she loved cooking, the unsocial hours prompted her to begin nursing training in Ardkeen Hospital (now Waterford Regional Hospital). She has been nursing since 1982 and has no regrets about her decision to change careers.

Mary – who is originally from Multyfarnham in Westmeath – is now a clinical nurse manager in Waterford Regional Hospital and loves her role. She is currently in charge of a 30-bed surgical ward and high on her list of duties is releasing time to care by using what is known as the 'productive ward'. This initiative looks at how to organise a ward well so that nurses can be released to care more for patients.

Mary introduced the 'pink apron' medication management initiative to her very busy ward. Under this initiative, nurses doing medication rounds wear a pink apron, which indicates that they are not to be disturbed. This works to reduce medication errors. According to Mary, medication management puts a huge demand on nurses' time. She says that she would like to see drugs coming into the wards in the doses required, because preparing antibiotics and other medication can be a very time consuming process. Mary hopes to influence change in this area where medications can be pre-prepared and more nurse-friendly.

'Home before 11' is another element of the 'productive ward' initiative. This is a discharge policy where patients, who know their date of discharge before they are admitted, are encouraged to organise for a family member to collect them

before 11am in order to make space for the next patient. Mary believes that this practice should be extended to twice a day to include a 'home before 4' initiative where people can go home later in the evening.

She believes that patients who undergo investigations and are subsequently deemed suitable for discharge should go home before 4pm, rather than staying until the next morning.

To organise their ward more efficiently, Mary and her colleagues set-up a 'patient status at a glance' board, which has a column for each allied health professional on the ward – each team member keeps their column live regarding the status of their patient (eg. if they have seen the patient, if the patient is for discharge or expected date of discharge). This means that most information on a particular patient can be seen with a quick look at the board. It prevents interruptions to nursing staff and gives them more time to provide care. This is a work in progress and changes are being made to see what works best.

Another initiative introduced by Mary is the 'kanban system', which is a storage system with see-through bins. The bins are all labelled and allow for stock to be brought to the front and enables stock to be rotated. The idea is to work off minimum rather than maximum stock levels, which encourages the rotation of stock and reduces wastage and costs.

Changes in meals were also introduced on Mary's ward following a survey of patients about their needs. Feedback included the introduction of half portions, which also cuts wastage. Staff worked



Mary McCormack, who is originally from Westmeath, is a clinical nurse manager at Waterford Regional Hospital

closely with the dietician in this area.

Mary has been a stalwart member and representative of the INMO over many years and is a proud winner of the Organisation's prestigious Gobnait O'Connell award. She was nominated for the award, which commemorates the late Gobnait O'Connell, by her Waterford nursing colleagues. The award is presented annually in memory of Gobnait, who died tragically in a car accident some years ago, in recognition of her contribution to nursing and midwifery in Ireland. Mary knew Gobnait well when she worked as an INMO industrial relations officer in her area.

After meeting her husband in Waterford, Mary settled there and the couple has two sons. Mary's mam now lives across the road from her and her husband's parents also live nearby, so she has a close family network.

Mary and her husband are keen rugby followers and travel to as many matches as possible. They love to holiday in France and Italy and hope to do more of that when they eventually retire.

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